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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0212
INFO ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 0055

C O N F I D E N T I A L HANOI 000839

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (CHANGE TEXT)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/09/29

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM VM](#)

SUBJECT: ACTION REQUEST: Lang Mai Monks and Nuns Forcibly Evicted By Police

REF: A) HCMC 599; B) HANOI 653 AND PREVIOUS

CLASSIFIED BY: Virginia Palmer, Deputy Chief of Mission; REASON:
1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (U) This is an action request. Please see paragraph six.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: The situation for the Lang Mai monks and nuns turned violent on September 27 and 28, as police and a group of angry locals attempted to forcibly evict the monks and nuns from Bat Nha pagoda in Lam Dong province. According to media and eyewitness reports, on September 27, plainclothes police and a local mob forced a group of 150 monks outside of their dormitory, then set about destroying property inside. The mob and plain clothes police beat two monks unconscious and forced the large group of monks into vehicles and took them away from the pagoda. On September 28, police forcibly evicted the remaining 230 nuns to a nearby pagoda. On the margins of the Deputy Secretary's meeting with Vice Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh on September 27, the Ambassador verbally expressed our concerns directly with the Vice Foreign Minister. We are following up with both the Ministry of Public Security and MFA Vice Minister Minh.B END SUMMARY.

3.B (C) The monks of Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh's Lang Mai Plum Village order called ConGenOff on the afternoon of September 27 to report that plainclothes police wearing masks and wielding batons had entered their compound within Bat Nha pagoda, along with the largest group of local "thugs" the monks had witnessed to date. The mob forced a group of 150 monks outside in heavy rains and proceeded to destroy property inside the dormitory, smashing windows and furniture and pouring water on electronic equipment, including the cell phones and laptops the monks used to communicate with the media and the Plum Village Order in France. ConGen contacts said two monks were beaten unconscious during the attack.

¶4. (C) When police took two senior monks into custody, several monks tried to stop them by lying down in the path of their vehicle. The two leaders were interrogated until late in the evening, then escorted home to Nha Trang and Hanoi, respectively. The senior monk from Nha Trang said the police attempted to get him to admit that Lang Mai was involved in "anti-government activities" during the interrogation. After he was escorted home by police, the monk said they took pictures of him and his father, told him to worship from home and said he should not "damage his clean record" and "put his relatives in a difficult situation." International media reports and eyewitnesses also reported that 80 to 150 monks were forcibly put on buses by authorities and transported away -- contacts said they had lost touch with the group and did not know where they were headed. A small group of monks walked 17 kilometers in the rain to seek refuge at a neighboring pagoda. A group of approximately 230 nuns and an undetermined number of monks were evicted on September 28 by the police. Contacts said the police took the remaining monks and nuns to the Phuoc Hiep pagoda, the largest in the local district.

15. (C) Upon learning of the incident, the Ambassador raised the issue with Vice Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh on the margin's of his meeting with the Deputy Secretary September 27. In a follow-up letter on September 28, the Ambassador stressed our concerns about the involvement of plainclothes public security officers in the instigation of mob unrest in the removal of the Plum Village monks, and stressed that this incident threatened to undermine Vietnam's improving record on religious freedom. We have requested a meeting with senior Ministry of Public Security officials to follow up on our protests/requests for assistance the last time violence erupted at Bat Nha (Ref B).

16. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: Post understands the Department intends to release the International Religious Freedom Report in the next few days. We recommend the Department update its points on Vietnam to stress our serious concern about the increased harassment and violence against peaceful religious followers and leaders by mob violence and local plain clothes police at the Bat Nha Pagoda. END ACTION REQUEST.
Michalak